

heart&soul

FINDING PEACE

MIND, BODY & SOUL

STANDARD

2 weeks ago
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By Tamara Natalie Madden

<http://www.newhssite2013.heartandsoul.com/?p=9666>

I clung firmly to the sides of the hospital bed—enveloped in pain—as my doctor inserted a 7-inch needle through my back and into my kidney. I was having a biopsy, and at age 21, I was beginning to question my own mortality. It would take a few weeks for the diagnosis of IGA Nephropathy to come back, and when it did, I reeled in shock and confusion. IGA Nephropathy (a genetic autoimmune kidney disease common in Caucasian and Asian males, and extraordinarily rare in women and people of African ancestry) began to ravage my young body almost immediately. Madness soon began to invade my mind because of the toxins building up in my body from my failing kidneys, and I found myself barely able to take care of my young daughter.

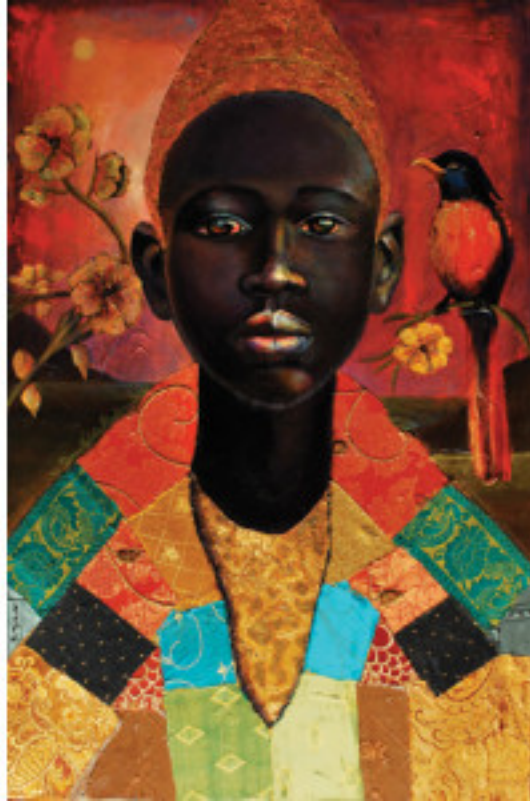


01) The Black Queen

I suffered through consistent pain, seizures, a coma, and horrid dialysis treatments. My skin darkened and hardened, and my body was emaciated—I became a shell of my former self. Professed friends disappeared, and my death seemed imminent from the perspective of many observing me. Death, however, was never on my agenda—I planned to live. I desperately needed to find solace so I sought it in God first, and it was through his guidance that I found art again. My paintings soothed my soul, and inspired me with hope and a will to live.

Nearly 3 years after the onset of my illness, I, in my worst physical state, took an impromptu trip back home to Jamaica, where I found my brother, whom I had never known. This serendipitous reunion was heightened by his offer of a kidney after only knowing me for one day. One year later, I lay in a hospital bed after a successful transplant surgery, and it was then that my purpose was revealed. I knew that it was God, art, and the love that I received from true friends and family that brought me through the depths of my sadness and illness, and I decided that in order to give back to God, I would pursue my passion as an artist—a constant thank you for my miraculous survival.

Since my transplant, I have dealt with many bouts of illnesses related to my new kidney. The consistent ingestion of steroids to keep my transplant affects the strength of my immune system, and puts me at risk for secondary illnesses. Although I maintain general good health through consistent exercise and nearly 16 years of a vegetarian diet, I cannot control the side effects of the medications I must take. I find myself constantly trying to balance my health and wellness with these necessary drugs.



02) Paradise

Recently, I suffered another devastating setback when I experienced what I believe to be a mini-stroke, seemingly triggered by the side effects of the very drugs that I take to keep myself alive. Not only did it leave me in distress, it also changed the way I speak, leaving me with yet another rare occurrence in my life: an apparent ailment called Foreign Accent Syndrome.

I spent a week learning how to speak again, and as I learned, I no longer recognized the voice coming from my mouth. This was another blow to my psyche, but I knew that I would make it through. With no signs of damage to my brain or any other part of my body, this transformation of my voice has left the doctors perplexed. Despite the changes, I continue to survive and thrive. I have learned to take life as it comes, and even through the impediments, I continue to find solace in God, creativity, and my loved ones.



03) Conqueror

I spend a lot of time creating, and art continues to heal me from the inside out by allowing me to release energy and emotion. Being able to manifest my thoughts and feelings visually gives me a sense of fulfillment and freedom. I also find regular writing sessions to be highly meditative, and a great form of release. I gain tremendous happiness from nature. A walk in the park not only allows me to have daily exercise, but it gives me time to think and connect with God. Each day I awaken to the sounds of cardinals and blue jays singing outside of my window—they bring me immense joy and peace and are a constant reminder of renewal and progression, and for that I am grateful.



Spatial

01 The Black Queen 30 x20 inch mixed media on canvas, 2012,

02 Paradise 30×20 inch mixed media on canvas, 2010

03 Conqueror 36×24 inch mixed media on canvas, 2012,

04 Spatial, 24×18 inch mixed media on canvas, 2012

Tamara Photo By Maurice Evans